

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 437

At the hospital.

Zinnia had stayed in the room with Zeke for over two hours.

“You don’t have to keep me company. Go protect Callin,” Zeke said. He knew Zinnia had left Shadow Moon Pavilion to side with Caitlin, though he still had doubts about her motives.

“Alright, I’ll head back then.”

Zinnia had already received Caitlin’s message telling her to leave the room. She picked up the food container, preparing to go, but Zeke stopped her.

“Wait”

“What is it?” she asked.

Zeke turned to look at her, his **eyes** dark and voice laced with quiet threat. “Whatever your reason for signing that death contract, I don’t care.

But I’m warning you—don’t hurt her. Or you already know what the consequences will be.”

He hadn’t asked why

y she signed it, but he could guess He

le didn’t care about her intentions—so long as Caitlin **wasn’t** harmed.

“I won’t hurt **her**, Zinnia replied softly, her gaze lowered. Then she turned and left.

But not long after she exited, footsteps approached again.

“You’re back already?” Zeke assumed it **was** Zinnia returning. But when he looked up, his expression darkened with shock.

“It’s **you?**”

The moment he saw who entered, Zeke's face fell further into shadow. **Displeasure** etched across his brows—he had no desire to see this

Woman.

Ximena had waited outside for hours. Knowing someone was in the room, she didn't dare intrude. Only after Zinnia left **did** she gather the

courage to come in

She was quiet, removing her sunglasses and mask after closing son she hadn't seen in years.

the door. She walked over slowly, eyes filling with tears as she looked at the

y words were trapped in her chest, but she didn't know how to begin.

So **many**

“Why are you here?” Zeke asked coldly, staring at the ceiling, refusing to meet her eyes.

I heard you were hurt. I wanted to see you.”

Her voice trembled. It broke her heart to see her own son treat her like a stranger—no, worse, like an enemy.

“I don’t need you here. I don’t know you. Leave.”

Zeke pointed to the door, his voice emotionless

Ximena’s tears fell. “Zeke... after all these years, you still can’t forgive me?”

“Forgive you?” Zeke shouted, abruptly sitting up. His eyes were bloodshot with rage.

“How? You tell me how i’m supposed to forgive you? Can a shattered heart be pieced back together? Can a severed head ber

“I know, I know I made mistakes... unforgivable mistakes, I’ve been trying to make it right. I know it’s hard. But no matter what, you’re my son—my flesh and blood. Since Heft Shadow Moon Pavilion, I haven’t stopped thinking about you”

She had forfeited the right to return to the Pavilion. Her endless search for the Codex had been, in part, her desperate attempt to get her on

back.

“Heh... If you really saw me as your son, why did you do those things? Why? Why did you make me see it with my own eyes? Do you even realize that day became a nightmare I’ll never wake up from?”

“Why do you think I became like this? It’s because of “you“. You and “him“. You both made me who I am!”

Zeke’s voice cracked with pain. He clutched his forehead, unable to suppress the turmoil inside.

Even as a child, Zeke had been withdrawn and emotionally unstable. When he was five, he witnessed something that would scar him forever

His mother, Ximena, had secretly met with Chu Yuan—one of Shadow Moon Pavilion’s instructors. They thought he was asleep, unaware he was hiding in the commer

Zeke saw everything. He saw h his mother in the arms of another man. Heard them talk about eloping

As fate would have it, Zorro—his father unexpectedly returned from a mission and caught them in the act

Zeke could never forget what happened next.

His father erupted in a fury, whipping Ximena and brutally punishing her lover. He dismembered Chu Yuan on the spot, drenching the room in blood.

Zeke had walked out from the shadows as his father stood, covered in gore, shouting, nearly rabid. His mother had collapsed on the ground, screaming and begging for mercy.

Then Zorro grabbed Zeke by the collar and “forced” him to watch.

“Remember this!” he shouted. “This is what happens to traitors!”

They could never comprehend what kind of trauma that left on a child.

It twisted Zeke forever.

As he grew older, he developed violent impulses, especially during breakdowns. He’d want to hurt people, to sever limbs—because only then could he feel some kind of release.

Listening to his rage, Ximena sobbed uncontrollably.

Of all her sins, this **one** haunted her most. She had failed him as a mother—never once fulfilling her responsibility.

Zorro had exiled her, **forcing** her to sign a **death** contract. The price of her life was her son, Zeke

And she had paid it.

“I thought you were doing fine all these years,” Zeke sneered, calmer now but no less bitter. “You left Shadow Moon Pavilion and built a name for yourself in the U.S. Even had another daughter.

“That Zora... she’s “his“, isn’t she? The bastard you cheated with? That’s your filthy lovechild?”

19:56, Wed, 18 Aug

7She’s your sister, no matter what,” Ximena said through tears.

“I don’t need a sister. I “never had a sister. Get that straight,

To him, Zora would always be a stain—a living reminder of his mother’s betrayal. He would never acknowledge her

“Alright... fine. Forget her. What about me, then? Zeke, tell me what can I do to make you see me again as your mother?”

Her voice cracked, hand pressed to her chest, heart aching

“You still want to be my mother? Then

en tell me this why did you kill Teresa? You knew what she meant to me. You knew she was like family

“I didn’t-

“Don’t lie!” Zeke snapped. “You said the same thing years ago when Father caught you, And how did that turn out?”

Ximena had no words. She couldn’t argue. She had lost the right to speak.

“Ask yourself—do you “deserve to be my mother?” Zeke turned away, lying back down. “Get out. I don’t want to see you again

His rejection cut deeper than any wound. Watching her son turn his back on her, Ximena couldn’t stop

the tears.

It was in that moment she truly understood—she would never, ever earn his forgiveness

She stood in silence, broken, before finally turning and leaving the room.

As she stepped out and closed the door, she found Caitlin standing in the hallway, waiting.

There was no time to hide. Ximena turned her head quickly, wiping her tears in a panic.

But Caitlin's voice was steady and cool.

“Ximena. We need to talk.”

AD

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Two cars pulled up to the shoreline one after the other.

Caitlin stepped out first, Ximena, glancing at her silhouette against the sea, followed silently

They stood together, facing the vast horizon. The sky and sea blended into a hazy gray just like the storm of emotions Inside Ximena.

“Don’t you have anything to say?” Callin asked, turning to look at her.

Ximena’s expression was sorrowful, conflicted beyond words.

*It must hurt, seeing your own son and yet not being able to call him your own, Caitlin continued softly. She wasn’t mocking her–i anything, her tone was almost like that of a friend’s

“You know everything, don’t you?” Ximena asked, struggling to keep her voice steady.

“Nothing stays hidden forever. What you’re facing now is the consequence of everything you did. Who else can you blame?”

“Yes...I can only blame myself.”

One wrong step had led to a lifetime of regret. Ximena **feared** there might never be a path back.

Something struck her. “Did you plan this? You told me he was hospitalized, knowing I’d come?”

“I knew you couldn’t turn your back on your own son.”

“Does your daughter know about your past?”

Ximena shook her **head**. “No. I’ve never told her,”

“She’s the result of your indulgence. But Zeke... Zeke was innocent. You destroyed his childhood with your own hands. He grew up **in a** twisted, suffocating world. You and the others made him that way.”

Zeke wasn’t born a monster. He was forced into darkness. Sienna **had** said it he **was** a tragic soul.

“No... it wasn’t like that... Ximena murmured through tears, eyes closed in pain. “Dean and I truly loved each other. Before I married Zorro,

he was the only one I ever loved. But Zorro forced the marriage. When I married him... I was already pregnant.”

Caitlin’s eyes widened. “You mean... Zeke is Dean’s son? Not Zorra’s?”

Ximena nodded, tears streaming down her face.

“No wonder Zorro treated him the way he did. He must have known Zeke wasn’t his. That’s why he made Zeke the price of the death.

contract?”

“Yes. He knew I’d submit for the sake of my son

“Dean joined Shadow Moon Pavilion to find you, didn’t he?”

Ximena’s heart clenched. “He did. He became an instructor just to be near me. He wanted to take me away. But by then, I was pregnant with Zorro’s child.

“I tried to explain. I begged Dean to leave, but Zorro returned **and** caught us together. In his rage, he killed Dean... and exiled me from Graystone Manor.”

Caitlin **was** stunned. “Then Zora... Zora is Zorro’s daughter?”

Another painful nod from Ximena.

“You say you loved Dean. Then why did you get involved with Xavian in the US. Why did you do all those things?”

“Because Dean was gone. And Xavian... he looked so much like Dean. I transferred my feelings onto him. As for the harm I caused him—it was jealousy. I was jealous of your mother.”

*So everything Zeke saw at five years old... it was just the surface. He didn’t know the truth. And the hatred he carries—it’s been fueled by Zorro all these years, hasn’t it?”

“Yes. Zeke hates me to his core. And I... I’ve never had the chance to explain. Even if I did, who would believe me?”

*I would,” Caitlin said firmly.

That one sentence broke something inside Ximena. Her sabs deepened.

“Ximena, there never needed to be bad blood between us. It was Zorro, He wanted “Yun’s Aromatic Codex“. That’s why he forced you to do all

those things.

“He killed the man you loved. He used your son to control you. He made you his puppet. Was it worth it?”

Ximena couldn’t respond. She **just** cried.

“You think the Codex is so **easy** to obtain? **What** if you spend your whole life chasing it and never succeed? Then what? You’ll never be able to reunite with your son. Was it worth it then?”

Each word Caitlin spoke was like a hammer striking Ximena’s heart.

She knew it Deep down, she knew everything she’d done had been in vain.

“Zeke didn’t tell you something. Maybe Zorro didn’t either.”

“what is it?” Ximena wiped her tears.

“He’s cut ties with Zorro. Completely.”

Ximena froze, stunned. “He... **what?**”

“He severed their relationship. For good. So tell me why are you still working for that **man?**”

Ximena stood in stunned silence.

“You’re a mother, and so am I. I understand your pain. When I found out Patricia was my daughter who’d died at birth, I couldn’t control myself either.

“My desire to bring her back was no different from your need to earn Zeke’s forgiveness.

“Zeke hates you because he doesn’t know the truth. But if it were me, I wouldn’t give up.

“I’d fight. Twice as hard. A hundred times harder. I’d let him go, let him hate me because hate is still connection. It’s better than being forgotten.

“Even if you never restore your bond, at least you’ll have no regrets.

“You abandoned him for so long. You weren’t there as a mother. Can you imagine how that shaped him?”

“He may hate you. But what if... deep down, he still longs for the love of a mother?”

“He’s turned his back on Zorro. That means, even just a little... he’s closer to you now

“Don’t you want to seize that chance? Don’t you want to hear him call you ‘Mom’ just once?”

Caitlin’s words pierced Ximena’s heart. She broke down in tears, overwhelmed by the raw truth,

It was Caitlin—her once enemy—who gave her clarity

In her lowest moment, the person who comforted her... was Callin

“These things... even my own daughter doesn’t know. I’ve buried it all deep, too afraid to speak of it. I never thought it would be you, of **all** people, who’d comfort me when I was at my worst.

“Thank you. Truly.”

Her voice was full of sincerity, like someone who had finally faced her sins and longed for redemption.

of what you've done. Own it.

-If you still want to be a good mother, then stop everything. Accept the consequences of "Only then can you look him in the eye and say you never abandoned him. That you never betrayed him.

"And even if you won't admit it... you you?"

ou know how important Teresa was to him. Ask yourself honestly—was her death really nothing to do with

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Ximena lowered her head, fell silent for a moment, and then took a deep breath, "Yes, it was me but not entirely me. Everything I did was under Zorro's control. Every step he took was aimed at removing obstacles in his quest to get The Yuncey Family's Codex"

She laid everything out for Caitlin. “I know my hands are stained with blood, I’ve committed unforgivable sins. But if I had a choice.. would’ve never done all those things for Zorro.”

Caitlin believed her—at least part of her story. The true villain in all of this was Zorro and his ambition.

Ximena was just a blade in his hand. A pawn.

“I believe you,” Caitlin said. “Tell me, have you heard the rumor that the Yun’s Aromatic Coder hides a map to some r sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? What was Zorro’s real reason for chasing it all **these** years?”

royal tomb treasure? It

Ximena looked drained, her eyes dry but her face etched with fatigue. “It’s not about a **royal** tomb or treasure. It’s something even bigger.”

She took a shaky breath and continued, “Before I left Shadow Moon Pavilion, Zorro told me that inside the Codex was a map... a map to a

lost ancient kingdom.”

Caitlin blinked. “A hidden kingdom?”

That was beyond absurd.

1. rd. Caitlin **had** read the first half of the Codex herself. All she’d found was the deed to the Fragrance & Dye Studio

nothing about any map.

“I don’t know if it’s true. But that’s what he said. That’s what he believes

Ximena had laid her cards on the table. Her willingness to confide in Caitlin was proof—she was no longer an enemy.

Caitlin, sensing an opportunity, pressed further. “If he’s been planning this for twenty years, then what about my grandfather’s family? Were

you

involved in the destruction of the Jonathan family?”

“I don’t know who did it,” Ximena said. “But it wasn’t Zorro. There were other factions just like Shadow Moon Pavilion, all eyeing the Codex Once your grandmother’s true identity was exposed, the Jonathan family was doomed. I don’t know who wiped them out. But when I took over

Thompson Residence, it wasn't a foreclosure. It was purchased from someone named Carlos Dominguez"

"Carlos Dominguez?" Caitlin repeated. "That wasn't anyone from the Jonathan family.

I got the property from."

"No. And that's who I got

Caitlin was thrown off. She'd always assumed it was Jonathan who'd sold off the family estate. Why was it passed through someone else? Was it trafficked through intermediaries?

Il find out."

"I've never heard of him... but I'll find

They had covered a fot. Caitlin now had more pieces of the puzzle.

And as for what to do with Ximena... killing her might not affect Zorro **at** all But using her? That could change everything,

1. ly. "What if we make a deal?"

“Ximena,” Caitlin said **suddenly**.

Ximena looked confused. “A deal?”

“I’ll help you fix things with Zeke. In exchange, you help me take Zorro down.”

There were no permanent enemies in this world. Only shifting alliances. If the goals aligned, even former adversaries could fight do bydd

Caitlin’s true enemy was Zorro.

Ximena’s eyes widened in disbellel. “You want to take down Zorro? Shadow Moon Pavilion?”

She **looked** at Caitlin like she’d lost her mind.

tion wa

Did she not know **what** kind of force she was challenging? Shadow Moon Pavilion wasn’t just a name it was a storm. And Zorro... he was at the eye of it.

“Zorro doesn’t need me to list his crimes, Caitlin said coldly. “He used me, tore me away from my daughter, and obsessed over the Codex like a madman. That man is evil to the core. He needs to fall.”

“You think I want to keep serving him?” Ximena said bitterly. “But... I don’t have much time left.”

Caitlin narrowed her eyes. “Your death contract... how long?”

“He gave me a deadline: retrieve the Codex, or die. I’ve failed. I’ve been discarded. I have one month left. Just one...”

Her voice broke.

Once the time was up, Shadow Moon Pavilion would send someone to eliminate her. She wouldn’t have anywhere to run.

“So you’re just going to accept that?”

Caitlin’s voice was firm. “Ximena, I don’t believe in fate. I believe in taking control of it. If death is coming either way, why not fight for

something?”

Ximena looked up at her, stunned. She had expected Caitlin to kill her, But instead, Caitlin was offering a partnership—an unthinkable one.

Going against Zorro... she still remembered the **way** he butchered Dean. The man was capable of anything.

“I don’t have any real power, Ximena whispered. “It would be like ants trying to topple a mountain...”

“Zorro’s cruelty

elty has turned everyone against him. Even Zeke **walked** away.

That tells y

you a

all you need to know—his empire is cracking.”

Caitlin stepped closer. “He’s discarded you. He thinks you betrayed him. You know too much. He won’t let you live.

“And your children... **do** you think he’ll spare them?”

Ximena’s breath hitched. She clutched her chest as if the weight of it all was suffocating her.

“I’m guessing the hit he ordered doesn’t stop with you. Once time’s up, he’ll send his assassins—to kill you and anyone he thinks could betray him: Zeke. Zora. All of them.”

Calt

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Caitlin was the first to leave the beach in her car. Ximena remained behind, standing motionless as the sea breeze blew past her, her mind still reeling from Caitlin's words. What should she do now

There was no one who could give her the answer.

Soon after the National Children's **Piano** Competition concluded, the official list of winners was released.

Under normal circumstances, the results wouldn't have raised any questions. The public typically accepted such outcomes without **much** thought. But this time, a video surfaced online—one that showed a parent confronting a judge over the results. Caitlin's face wasn't clearly shown, but her voice questioning the judge came through loud and clear.

It didn't take long before keywords like "Controversy Over National Piano Competition" and "Fierce Parent Confronts Judge" shot to the top of trending topics nationwide, sparking heated debate.

Online opinions quickly split into two camps: one group admired the parent's courage to question authority and fight for fairness; the other criticized the parent for being petty and overly dramatic, claiming that if her child didn't win, she should just accept it instead of creating a

scene.

As the buzz grew, media outlets began following up, releasing performance videos from the final round of contestant No. 24 alongside those of the top three winners.

Once people saw the footage, public opinion began to shift drastically.

“This kid is amazing! And he didn’t even place? What a shame!”

“If I were the parent, I’d demand an explanation too. Clearly the best performance, yet the lowest score? Seriously?”

“Are the judges deaf? Even if he didn’t win, how could he come in dead last?”

Support for contestant No. 24 swelled. Viewers demanded a fair re-evaluation and questioned the integrity of the judging panel. The judge who gave the suspiciously low score was soon identified as Zora, XEG’s design director, who, despite her impressive musical credentials, was primarily known for her work in design.

People questioned how someone with a career in fashion could possibly be **qualified** to judge a national music competition. The logic didn’t add up.

Then another video emerged: **a clip showing Zora and** the anonymous contestant performing the same song side by side. While the child’s face was obscured and his name hidden for privacy, viewers quickly picked up on the differences. Many agreed the young boy’s performance

matched, if not surpassed, that of the judge.

The internet exploded.

“Who is this little genius?!”

“How could someone this talented not win—let alone come in last? This is unreal”

“I was at the venue. No. 24 really was the best. No clue why they tanked his score.”

“Judges like this should be banned. Total disgrace.”

The boy was soon dubbed the “Uncrowned King” of the competition by netizens. Although the **results** couldn’t be reversed, online users rallied for justice, flooding Zora’s **social** media pages with criticism.

In the XEG Design Center’s director office, Zora’s assistant entered in a hurry.

*Director Zora, bad news—you’re trending, and it’s not good.”

“What are they saying now?” Zora asked, putting down her design sketches.

The assistant showed her the links. After reading, Zora sneered. “Of course this is Callin’s doing. She’s manipulating public opinion

“How can you be sure?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m the only one named. Her and her son’s identities are completely hidden—fake names, obscured faces. That’s intentional. She wants to destroy my reputation.”

The assistant nodded in agreement. “Should we issue a public apology?”

“Apologize? To her?” Zora slammed the desk. “Draft a legal warning to those spreading slander and threats. Anyone who crosses the line will be held accountable.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

As the assistant turned to leave, Zora stopped her again.

“Wait”

“Yes?”

Zora stared at the screen thoughtfully. A wicked idea was taking shape. Maybe she could ride this wave of controversy and use it to boost her upcoming product launch.

Bad press or good press—attention was attention. That’s what mattered,

“Don’t send the legal warning just yet. **Issue** a statement instead: XEG will hold a press conference tomorrow morning to address the situation.”

“Got it.”

After her assistant left, Zora summoned the head of advertising-

“The launch date for our new collection has been moved to next Tuesday.”

ising was stunned. “Won’t that overlap with TIG’s launch?”

The head of advertising

“Exactly. Let’s go head-to-head. Let’s see who steals the spotlight. Make it happen.”

She then called for XEG’s newly appointed chief designer, Jillian,

“How’s the sample coming along from the sketches I gave you?”

Jillian, a new hire, **had** already been trusted with a lead role—proof of how highly Zora and Ximena regarded her.

“It’s nearly finished. Should be ready by the weekend.”

“Good. After the launch, I’ll treat you to a shopping spree. Get back to work

Everything was going according to her plan.

As she thought of Caltin’s flawless face, Zora’s fingers tightened around the papers in her hand. Her eyes flashed with malice.

This time, she would make sure Caitlin never got up

again.

New York Correctional Facility.

Caitlin had scheduled a visit with Jonathan, Through the glass, she saw the once proud man now shaved bald, wearing an orange **jumpsuit**, stripped of all his former grandeur.

When he realized the person visiting him was Caitlin, his expression contorted with disbelief, and his hands began to tremble.

The woman who had sent him here... was now standing before him. What did she want?

“Caitlin? What are you doing **here**?”

She picked up the phone on her side of the glass, her voice steady, “I have something important to ask you. I hope you’ll answer truthfully

“What is it?”

“Do you know someone named Carlos Dominguez?”

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“Carlos Dominguez?”

Jonathan’s face twisted in confusion, clearly trying to remember. “Carlos who?”

“When you took over Thompson Global Ventures, didn’t the Thompson Residence go through your hands too? The property was transferred through someone named Carlos—don’t you know who he is?”

Caitlin had already run a background check. Aside from the property transfer years ago, Carlos had since disappeared from the country’s records—like a ghost. No trace of him remained.

Jonathan went silent, lost in thought for a long moment before finally speaking.

“I don’t know him. Walter Thompson’s estate never passed through me. I did try to acquire the Thompson Residence, but by the time I **made** the move, the property was no longer under Walter’s name. I assumed it had been seized by the court and didn’t press the matter further. Later, I learned that XEG’s CEO, Ximena, had bought the estate.”

After speaking, Jonathan noticed Caitlin staring at him in silence. He hurried to add, "That's all I know. I swear I'm telling the truth."

Caitlin nodded slowly. She could tell by his eyes—he was being honest.

Which meant even Jonathan didn't know who Carlos really was. She would have to dig deeper from another angle.

She stood up to leave, but Jonathan suddenly got to his feet and called out, "Caitlin!"

She paused.

Jonathan's eyes were red, his lips trembling as he pressed one palm against the glass, guilt and regret written all over his worn face.

"I'm sorry, Caitlin... I was a complete bastard back then..."

After his time behind bars, he had nothing left but regret. If he had treated Caitlin and her brother with a shred of decency, things might've turned out differently.

Caitlin looked at him with zero sympathy. "There's one thing I didn't tell you—I've already found Harrison."

“Harrison?” Jonathan’s expression crumpled, a mix of guilt and shame overtaking him. “Is he... is he alright?”

“He’s suffered a lot. But from now on, I won’t let that happen again.”

Jonathan nodded, then hesitantly asked, “Have you seen Jasmine and Megan? How are they? Why haven’t they visited even once? If you do see them... could you tell them... I want to see them?”

Jasmine and Megan–Caitlin had practically forgotten about them. It had been ages since she last saw that mother–daughter pair.

“I’ll pass along the message if I run into them.”,

She hung up the call and walked out of the visitation room.

Next, she used the paperwork Felix had arranged to visit another inmate–Black Hawk.

Though not yet formally sentenced, Black Hawk had been detained due to the severity of his crimes.

In the secure interview room, Caitlin came face-to-face with the notorious killer. His head had been shaved, but his eyes were still sharp and

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dangerous.

When he saw Caitlin, he rushed at the bars like a caged animal, gripping the iron tightly with a feral snarl.

“If I were you, I wouldn’t waste my time playing the cornered-beast act.”

Caitlin stood in front of him, completely unfazed. “No matter how long you keep that smug grin on your face, the law out being you in justice.”

“Your laws don’t apply to me.”

Black Hawk scoffed, leaning back. He was a foreign national and had been banking on diplomatic protections, along with his refusal to confess. So far, the prosecutors had no leverage.

Caitlin’s voice turned icy. “With where you stand now, do you really think any lawyer would still defend you? Do you believe **your home** country would send a diplomat to save a serial killer?”

She stepped closer. “If you’re smart, you’ll tell us everything—who hired you, who you work for. Unless you really plan to die as a **pawn** wide

the true mastermind walks free.”

She was after the identity of the one who had hired him. She wanted the truth behind her mother’s disappearance. But Black Hawk **wasn’t** giving in.

“I don’t know,” he sneered. After a pause, his lips curled into a mocking grin. “Even if I did, what could you do about it?”

“I can’t do anything?” Caitlin narrowed her eyes. “But the justice system can. Sending you to the execution chamber is just a matter of time.

He let out a dark laugh and stepped back.

“Kill me, and you’ll never learn where your mother is! Hahahaha...”

His laughter echoed through the room.

Caitlin's expression remained unreadable. She had no doubt—he knew something. He was just too cunning, too stubborn, to speak. **Because** the second he did, he'd be signing his own death warrant.

How could she get him to talk?

She stared at his back, her voice steely with resolve. “No matter how tough or unbreakable a person thinks they are... everyone has a

weakness. I'll find yours.”

Black Hawk didn't turn around, but his head tilted slightly at her words.

Find his weakness?

We'll see.

Caitlin turned coldly and walked out of the secure room. She still had one more place to go.

At the hospital.

Zeke had been stuck there for two days and was growing increasingly restless. He wanted to see **Caitlin, but she still hadn't** come.

Every time the door opened—whether it was a nurse, a doctor, or one of his men—he glanced up, hopeful... **only to be disappointed again.**

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She **knew** he was **in** the hospital. So why hadn't she come?

He called one of his men into the room. “What’s Caitlin been up to the past couple of days?”

“We’ve tracked her movements. Today, she went to the prison.”

Zeke raised an eyebrow. “To visit who?”

“Her father, we think. Jonathan is being held there.”

“I see. You can leave.”

Zeke picked up his phone, staring at it for a long time. He wanted to message her, but didn't know what to say. He typed, deleted, **typed** again, deleted again.

Before he could make up his mind, a commotion started outside his room..

“Please, let me through—just for a minute!”

“You're not allowed in without Mr. Zeke's permission!”

“I only brought something for him! It'll just take a second!”

The voices weren't clear, but it was obviously a woman arguing with the guards. Zeke gestured for his men.

“Who is it?”

His guard stepped in and replied, “Sir, it's Ms. Harris. She wants to see you. Should I let her in?”

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The moment Zeke heard it was Ximena, he snapped, “Tell her to get lost!”

“Yes, sir,” the guard responded and stepped out to deliver the message. “I’m sorry, Ms. Harris, but Mr. Zeke doesn’t want to see you go leave.”

The guard was still relatively polite, but Ximena had already heard Zeke’s angry voice through the door. He had told her to get lost

That one word hurt more than a knife to the heart. It left her breathless, but she still forced a weak smile and held back her fears. Alright, r leave... but I brought some food. Can you at least give this to him?”

“You can take it back with you. Mr. Zeke won’t touch it.”

They followed Zeke’s orders to the letter. No one would accept anything from Ximena.

Left with no choice, Ximena quietly turned away, the thermal container still in hand. As she walked away, tears slipped down her cheeks.

But she quickly wiped them dry.

Caitlin was right. If she wanted to reach her son, she had to show him with actions. If once wasn't enough, then she'd come again—again and again—until he gave her a chance.

If he wouldn't see her today, she'd return tomorrow.

“Giving up that easily?”

The gentle yet firm voice floated over from the hallway.

Ximena looked up and saw Caitlin walking toward her, graceful and calm.

“Caitlin, thank God you're here! I... I can't get in. He won't see me.”

Running into Caitlin in the hallway was like a lost traveler suddenly finding the North Star.

Seeing her swollen red eyes, Caitlin could tell she'd been crying. She reached out her hand. "Give me the food. I'll take it in."

"Thank you, thank you so much."

Ximena handed over the thermal container, her eyes filled with hope. Right now, Caitlin was the only person she could rely on.

Caitlin nodded, then carried the food to the room. The guards at the door instantly stood upright and greeted her respectfully, "Caitlin!"

Their voices were loud enough for Zeke to hear from inside. The second he heard her name, he perked up.

Caitlin?

She finally came!

Caitlin stepped into the room. Zeke tried to sit up, but she stopped him. "Don't move too much. Lie back."

“Caitlin...”

“How are you feeling?”

“A little better.”

He leaned back into the pillows, eyes locked on her, afraid that if he blinked, she might vanish again.

She placed the container on the bedside table. “Hungry? Want to eat something?”

“Yes.”

He assumed she had cooked it herself and immediately nodded,

Caitlin raised the head of the bed and opened the container, laying out the dishes one by one, including a rich, fragrant chicken **soup** at the bottom. Just looking at it, she could tell Ximena had poured her heart into it.

The smell made Zeke’s stomach growl. “You made all this?”

Caitlin didn't answer. Instead, she handed him a spoon. "Go ahead and eat. You need to rebuild your strength"

Zeke, thinking the food was from Caitlin, accepted it gratefully. Though part of him wished she would feed him, he knew better—his injuries

weren't in his hands, after all.

He devoured the food, finishing every bite and polishing off the soup. He looked visibly better.

"It's been so long since I've had your cooking. Thank you, Caitlin. It was delicious."

That's when Caitlin finally spoke the truth. "Zeke, I didn't cook this. It was from Ximena."

"What? Her?"

His instinct was to vomit everything he'd just eaten.

"There's no need for that kind of reaction," Caitlin said calmly. "Whether you hate her or resent her, this is just one small thing she owed you

Taking it doesn't mean you forgive her—it just means she's trying.”

“Why are you defending her?”

He stared at her with suspicion. He couldn't understand why Caitlin was suddenly speaking on Ximena's behalf.

“I'm not taking sides. I'm just asking you to consider this—what you think you know may not be the whole truth. Maybe you've misunderstood her. Maybe what you saw back then wasn't the full picture.”

“Stop it. Don't talk about her anymore! I don't want to hear it!”

Zeke's emotions flared, and Caitlin saw that the wounds between mother and son ran deeper than words could fix.

“Alright,” she sighed. “I'll stop. Rest well.”

She began packing up to leave, but Zeke quickly reached out and grabbed her wrist. “Caitlin... I didn't mean to snap at you. You're not mad

at me, are you? You'll still come see me?”

Caitlin smiled gently. "Of course. Even if we were just ordinary friends, I'd still come visit when you're hurt. And you're more than that. You're

someone I care about."

"Just... a friend?" His heart sank.

That was it then. Caitlin had just redefined him.

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Chapter 442

Zeke looked devastated it still gathered his course. "Can't your por me i chart verkaferle you for live years. Don't tell me that madhe marking

"Is your bond with Sebastian from jus

"He'd give his life for you. So would 1. He treats you w

“Is it because of Zorro? Because he’s my father? I’ve cut ties with

happiness, Caitlin—”

There was sadness in his voice, and his eyes were filled with pain, with a fragile, braban sart of kepa

Caitlin gently removed his hand and sat back down, her tone soft but firms.

“Zeke, I know how you feel. I appreciate everything you’ve done for me. I always will

“But even if Sebastian didn’t exist, I still couldn’t love you back. I won’t lead you on. I won’t string your string i

“If possible, I hope you can still be part of the kids’ lives. Be their uncle. Try letting me go. Look beyond that’s meant for you.”

She stood, picked up the food container, and turned to leave. Then she paused.

“One more thing—make sure you’ve got good people watching your back. Don’t let your guard down around on

Zeke said nothing.

Caitlin let out a quiet sigh and left the room.

As she stepped into the hallway, she froze.

Just ahead, leaning casually against the wall, was Sebastian.

He looked like a man who had been waiting all day—for *the* woman he loved to find him there.

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 443

Realizing she'd come to the hospital without telling Sebastian, Caitlin picked up her pace. When she saw him standing there, her heart tightened—was he jealous again?

She quickly walked over and offered an explanation. "Sorry, I meant to call you, but you were in a meeting."

Sebastian, already past the stage of pointless jealousy, smiled and wrapped an arm around her shoulder. "No need to explain further as much—that's why I came to pick you up. Everything settled?"

"Yeah."

He glanced at the thermal container in her hand. Caitlin gave a sheepish smile. "Actually, I didn't make this it was from Ximena."

"I know. You think your husband's that petty? Even if you brought him food, I wouldn't have cared. We owe him, after all, don't we?"

Sebastian flashed a charming smile and planted a kiss on her cheek. This time, he truly meant every word. That unnecessary jealousy from last time had taught him a lesson—he needed to trust her, support her, and be the one who always understood her.

"I'm relieved to hear that."

As long as this overly jealous man didn't get mad, everything would be fine.

Ximena hadn't left yet. She was waiting near the hospital parking lot. Seeing Caitlin and Sebastian approach, she stepped forward

"Mr. Vanderbilt, Caitlin..."

"This is yours," Caitlin handed her the container. "He ate everything and said it was good."

"Oh... thank you! Thank you so much!"

Ximena accepted it, grateful and emotional.

"No need to thank me."

Caitlin and Sebastian nodded politely and got into their car.

As they drove, Caitlin told him about everything that had happened that day.

Speaking of Black Hawk, Sebastian said, "I've got people digging for leads. If we can figure out his real identity, we might find his weakness."

“Good. I have to break him.”

Then she asked, “By the way, did they find out who ambushed you in Silverstone? Tyler’s back, right?”

Earlier that day, Caitlin had called Sebastian, and it was Xavi who answered. He mentioned Tyler had returned.

“They did. Just a low-level hitman. Some nobody willing to die for money. Nothing to worry about.”

“But don’t get careless. Your life is way too valuable. Stay low for a while, please.”

Caitlin didn’t want him showing his face in public too boldly. It was too risky.

“I get it. I’ll stick to being *your* loyal little shadow. I’ll protect you during the day, warm your bed at night-how’s that sound?”

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Sebastian gave her a teasing grin. Caitlin pushed his head away playfully. “Just drive, will you?”

“Yes, ma’am, Your Majesty! First, dinner. Then, the premiere. If you don’t show up, Yates is going to cry

“If he doesn’t do well, he’ll be crying anyway.”

They both laughed. Sebastian drove the

to the Shangri-La restaurant in the city, where he’d already reserved a private room,

As they walked in, the host led them toward the back.

At that same moment, at a window table nearby, Zora was having dinner with a man. She noticed Caitlin entering and signaled **to** the man across from her.

“Look at the door. There she is.”

Abel turned his head and glanced at Caitlin walking through the hallway.

“That’s Caitlin. What do you think?”

Abel smirked, amused. “She looks cold and untouchable, but it’s just an act.”

From what he’d gathered, she didn’t seem that difficult to manipulate.

“Think you can handle her?”

Zora had invited Abel specifically to deal with Caitlin. Her plan was for Abel to wedge himself between Caitlin and Sebastian—to tear them

apart.

“Of course. There’s no woman I can’t handle.”

Abel was pale-skinned, with striking features and mesmerizing eyes. His gentlemanly manners and soft charm made him irresistible to many

women.

He’d gotten where he was thanks to those looks—countless wealthy women had fallen at his feet. Once he had a target, he never failed.

“She’s not like other women.”

“Oh?” He leaned back with a smug look. “You really think there’s a woman I can’t get?”

He took pride in his so-called conquests and thrived on high-stakes challenges. The harder the woman, the more interested he became.

“If you manage to win her over,” Zora said coldly, “I’ll fund your film company and back your IPO.”

“Deal.”

Abel grinned. The offer was too tempting to refuse.

“She’ll be at Yates’s premiere tonight. Make your move.”

“Got it.”

The mention of Yates made Abel’s smile turn sharp. He had old scores to settle with that man, and tonight w

De a **start**.

In the private room, a romantic candlelit dinner was already prepared.

Sebastian pulled out a chair for Caitlin and waited for her to sit before bending over her shoulder to **eat a les**

Only after getting his sweet reward did he take his own seat across from her.

“Try the steak,” he said with a smile.

Caitlin took a bite and nodded. “Hmm, not bad.”

That small bit of approval made Sebastian’s heart soar. They exchanged a quiet smile and dug in.

Halfway through the meal, Sebastian’s phone rang.

“You’ve got a call,” Caitlin said. “Go ahead and answer.”

“I don’t like being disturbed when I’m with you.”

He glanced at the screen. “It’s Vincent—probably something from the office. I’ll take it.”

“Okay. I’m going to the restroom real quick.”

While Sebastian took the call, Caitlin stepped out. On her way back, she accidentally bumped into someone.

She froze.

The other person also stepped back. The drink in his hand splashed all over his silver suit. The mango juice left a bright yellow stain, ruining the expensive fabric.

“I’m so sorry,” Caitlin said quickly. “I didn’t see you.”

“No worries,” the man said casually, looking down at his ruined clothes before lifting his head to meet her eyes.

Caitlin blinked at his soft, handsome features, feeling genuinely apologetic. “Should I pay for the cleaning?”

“It was partly my fault too,” Abel replied smoothly. “How about this—you take it to the cleaners for me, and return it once it’s done. Sound

fair?”

He wasn’t pushy, and his demeanor was gracious.

“That’s fine,” Caitlin nodded.

“Here’s my card. You can contact me once it’s ready.”

Abel handed her his business card along with the jacket, waiting for her to take it.

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

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Just as Caitlin was about to take the business card, a long, slender hand reached out and intercepted it.

Sebastian took the card, glanced at it, and casually wrapped an arm around Caitlin's shoulder.

"My girlfriend stained your jacket. Apologies. We'll get it cleaned and return it to you?"

Not giving Abel a chance to speak, Sebastian led Caitlin away.

Abel turned and watched them leave, his eyes narrowing.

If he wanted to get close to Caitlin, he'd first have to get past Sebastian.

Back in the private room, Sebastian tossed the jacket and the business card onto a nearby chair.

"Stay alert around men like that. Don't give them any opening."

Caitlin chuckled. "What kind of opening? You think that guy did it on purpose just to get close to me?"

"Can't say for sure."

Sebastian sipped his wine. “In my eyes, any man who talks to you—aside from me—probably has questionable motives.

“You think I’m some sort of universal heartthrob? That every man’s into me?”

Caitlin teased, and Sebastian leaned in, gently lifting her chin with his fingers.

“Absolutely. You’re a treasure everyone wants, but only I get to have.”

His voice was soft, eyes deep with emotion. He wasn’t interested in the food anymore—only her.

They lingered in that romantic bubble far longer than the meal itself lasted.

Finally, Sebastian pulled away with reluctance. “If we didn’t have plans after this, I’d never let you go.”

They stood to leave. Outside, Xavi was waiting. Sebastian handed him the jacket for dry cleaning and left the restaurant with Caitlin,

The premiere was being held at New York’s largest theater. The film, “Euphoria Voyage, starred Yates. Though PE wasn’t the distributor, they were one of the investors.

Caitlin and Sebastian arrived low-key and met up with Yates in the backstage lounge.

“Boss! Boss! You being here for my premiere is such an honor!”

Yates rushed over, grinning ear to ear—not even trying to act like a composed actor. He was clearly fanboying hard.

Sebastian cleared his throat softly, signaling him to dial it back.

But Yates wasn’t the least bit intimidated. “Thank you, boss, for bringing your wife to support my big night! This is a major milestone for **me**. Please, take your seats—the premiere’s about to start. Afterward, drinks are on me at Club No. 8!

Yates was thrilled and clearly eager to impress Caitlin with his performance.

Just then, a man walked in. “Yates!”

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Yates turned, surprised. “Abell Man, what are you doing here?”

“Just got back from overseas. Heard tonight was your premiere, so came to show bona sponit”

They hugged.

“Word is you’ve been doing well—running your own film company now? That’s impress

“Just a small gig.”

“Come, let me introduce you to our boss.”

Yates beamed and proudly brought Abel over. “This is my old friend, Abel. We go way back. Abel, met my Geeshan, and has dele Caitlin.”

“So you’re Abel? I think we crossed paths at the restaurant earlier.”

Sebastian recognized him. Abel smiled politely. “Mr. Vanderbilt, I’ve heard a lot about you. And you must be Catlin? We did meet now—small world.”

“You’ve already met?” Yates looked surprised.

The group made small talk. Abel was smooth and casual, hiding any deeper motives well.

Yates saw Abel as a close friend. But for Abel, that friendship had soured long ago.

He had never let go of the resentment from years back—if Yates hadn't stolen that audition from him, he would be the one with the wards

and the fame. Not Yates.

After a few more exchanges, Sebastian and Caitlin went to find their seats while Abel and Yates stayed behind to chat until the premiere began.

Before the screening, there was a red-carpet event and a round of interviews. Yates, as the lead actor, appeared with the director and other

key cast members, answering questions and engaging fans.

The atmosphere was lively and electric. To support Yates, Caitlin and Sebastian even sent a massive congratulatory bouquet.

When the interviews and interactions ended, the movie began.

It was a romantic comedy with nostalgic undertones, very different from Yates's past work. But his acting was flawless—he really was born for this industry, as proven by his two Best Actor awards.

Throughout the 90-minute film, the audience was captivated—laughing, cheering, even tearing up. When the credits rolled, thunderous applause filled the theater.

But just as the premiere concluded, several uniformed officers entered the screening room. They flashed their badges.

“Mr. Yates, you’ve been reported for possession and use of illegal substances. We need you to come with us for questioning.”

One officer reached for him. Yates resisted. “didn’t! You’ve got the wrong person!”

The theater erupted into chaos. His fans sat frozen in shock, watching as their idol was taken away.

In the crowd, Abel watched calmly, a faint, sinister smirk curling on his lips.

A scandal like this, hitting right at Yates's peak—he'd never recover from it. Not in this lifetime.

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Yates's **protests** could still be heard echoing down the hallway. Caitlin **turned to** Sebastian, her expression Day

“Go see what’s going on–now.”

“I’m on it.”

Sebastian got up immediately and followed the officers.

They hadn’t taken Yates away just yet. First, they wanted to search his belongings and dressing room.

In his bag, they found a small packet of white powder. Field testing confirmed it was drugs. An officer held it up.

Yates was frantic. “I don’t know what that is! Why was that in my bag? Get my agent! Call my assistant!”

“Mr. Yates, regardless of your status, if you break the law, you’ll be held accountable. You can explain at the station. Take him.

“I didn’t do it! I swear I never touched that stuff!”

Yates was in disbelief. He had never used drugs—so how did it end up in his things?

Sebastian arrived as they were leading him out. He rushed over.

“Yates, what the hell happened?”

“Sebastian, I didn’t! I swear I didn’t...”

He was on the verge of breaking down—wrongfully accused, with no way to prove his innocence.

“I believe you. Stay calm. I’ll get to the bottom of this.”

Yates nodded weakly, trying to hold it together.

The police took him away. Sebastian turned to the lead officer.

“Officer, are you sure there’s no mistake here?”

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Comment

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

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Sebastian knew his friends well—what they were capable of, what they would never do. If Yates were the **kind of man to** break the la wouldn’t have remained Sebastian’s friend.

“Mr. Vanderbilt, we found narcotics in Yates’ bag. We’ll also be searching his residence. We can’t draw any final conclusions until t investigation is complete. Sorry,” the officer said, recognizing Sebastian before quickly departing.

The premiere venue was in chaos. Fortunately, Caitlin was experienced in managing crises. She immediately contacted the **director**, producer, and PR team to take control of the scene and prevent attendees from leaking any details.

Thanks to Caitlin’s quick response, most fans and industry guests expressed sympathy for Yates and agreed to wait for an official investigation before spreading rumors.

As the crowd dispersed, Abel approached Caitlin.

“I believe in Yates. He’s not that kind of person. There must be some mistake.”

Caitlin nodded. “Once the truth comes out, he’ll be cleared.”

Sebastian returned just then, and Caitlin asked, “How did it go?”

“Yates has been taken into custody. The police found a bag of drugs in his belongings.”

“How could this happen?”

Caitlin knew the situation had escalated. “Come on, let’s head to PE.”

She and Sebastian left the theater. Abel followed last. As he exited, he glanced up at the screen:

Euphoria Voyage.

Yates's journey of euphoria... might just turn into a journey of ruin. Heh.

Although premiere attendees promised not to leak the news, by the time Caitlin and Sebastian arrived at PE, headlines about Yates's arrest were already flooding the internet.

A double-award-winning superstar getting busted on the night of his film's premiere? It was an entertainment earthquake of magnitude **12**.

Comment sections were exploding:

[There's no way our idol would do drugs!]

\[Impossible! My king would never break the law!],

\[This industry is a mess... I thought Yates was the last clean name in showbiz.]

The scandal shot to the top of trending searches.

At PE, Caitlin immediately convened the crisis PR team to initiate emergency damage control.

First, they issued a public statement, urging fans and the public to wait for the full investigation and

ng transparency.

Second, they dispatched their legal team to assist with the case, gather all facts, and prepare Yates's legal defense.

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Once everything was in motion, Caitlin sat down with Sebastian.

“We’re looking at two possibilities here. One–Yates is guilty. Two–someone framed him.

“If it’s the first, drug testing will confirm it. If it’s the second, we need to find out who planted the evidence”

“I’ve already ordered our team to contact his agent and assistant. Whoever planted that in his bag had to be someone **close**.

Caitlin nodded. With PE stabilized for now, they left the building.

Sebastian dropped Caitlin off at the Vanderbilt estate, then personally went to the precinct to learn more.

Meanwhile, the scandal was gaining momentum.

At a luxury private residence the next morning, Zora woke in Abel's arms. They were now more than co conspirators—**they were lovers,**

Watching the news unfold, Zora asked, “Happy now?”

“Ecstatic. Watching the man I hate the most fall from grace? Nothing's sweeter.”

“Then you'd better act fast. Sebastian will be tied up dealing with this, and Caitlin's busy with her launch. This is your window.”

Zora got up—XEG had a press conference that day to address the piano competition scandal.

Their press event went ahead as scheduled, though the media in attendance were all second-rate. The major outlets were too busy covering Yates's arrest.

Zora gave a vague, non-committal statement about the judging controversy, then shifted focus to promoting XEG's upcoming product launch -conveniently scheduled for the same day as TIG's event.

Meanwhile, public backlash against Yates continued to grow.

Fans were heartbroken. Brands cut ties. His movie release was in limbo. The scandal wasn't just a PR nightmare—it threatened to end his entire career.

At the police station, Sebastian got an update from the legal team. Things looked bad.

Not only had drugs been found in Yates's bag, but police had also discovered more at his home—double evidence, nearly irrefutable.

There was, however, one major factor in Yates's favor: he had tested negative for drug use three times. That at least proved he wasn't an addict.

His agent, a top manager at PE, confirmed he'd never seen Yates near drugs.

But the assistant? He'd turned on Yates, accusing him directly.

Yates likely never saw it coming—the assistant who'd worked for him for four years stabbing him in the back at **the worst possible** time.

Now the situation was dire.

Sebastian, along with Benjamin Nolan and the rest of the team, began investigating. They needed to **trace the drugs back to their source and**

uncover the truth.

Caitlin, meanwhile, was running between PE and TIG, making final preparations for the upcoming launch.

As she stepped out of her car, she heard someone call her name.

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“Caitlin!”

It was Abel.

He hurried over, looking anxious. “How’s Yates? I went to the station but couldn’t get in. I’m really worried, so I thought I’d ask you

Seeing his concerned expression, Caitlin responded honestly. “It’s not looking good. But we’re doing everything we can.”

“Please, if you see him, tell him I’m trying to help too. I’m reaching out to some people to see if I can do anything”

“Thanks. I’ll pass that along.”.

After a brief exchange, Caitlin went into the building. Abel had

Back upstairs in the executive suite, the design department head

“Caitlin! We’ve got a serious problem.”

“What is it? Speak.”

Anyone trying to play games with Caitlin was about to get burned.

what he wanted—another step closer, building rapport.

ame rushing over.

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“XEG just held a press conference announcing that their new product launch is also scheduled for Tuesday—same **day as** ours, they’re clearly trying to go head-to-head with us.”

After hearing the design director’s report, Caitlin nodded calmly. “I understand. Don’t let them shake our focus. Our launch will proceed as planned.”

“Understood.”

Once the design lead left, Caitlin reviewed the completed garments with designer Justin. After going through the full series, she gave her praise without hesitation.

“Nice work. You’ve done well, Justin. Next, I’ll arrange for you and the Starline models to coordinate fittings. Whether TIG’s launch succeeds on Tuesday depends heavily on your designs.”

“Thank you, Caitlin. I won’t let you down,” Justin replied with growing confidence.

After wrapping up her discussion with Justin, Caitlin held a brief strategy meeting with CEO Garrett to finalize preparations for Tuesday's

event.

With everything on TIG's end in order, Caitlin then made her way to Starline to meet with Molly.

As soon as Molly saw her, she grabbed Caitlin's arm anxiously. "Caitlin, what's going on? What happened to Yates? You and Sebastian were just at the premiere last night, weren't you?"

Molly had originally planned to attend the premiere too, but Simon had a last-minute surgery, so they'd changed plans.

"It all happened so fast. Yates was taken by the police. Sebastian's helping investigate, but right now, all we can do is wait."

After discussing Yates for a bit, their focus shifted to the product launch. Molly asked, "I just heard XEG is launching on the same day as you. Isn't that clearly a provocation? What's your plan?"

"I'm not backing down just because she wants to provoke me. Let them come. We'll see whose work really stands out."

Caitlin had no intention of retreating. She was fully aware that Zora's move was deliberate.

“Alright, I’ve got the models you need set aside for you. You can send someone over to TIG to coordinate with them.”

Molly took Caitlin to review the modeling team. In addition, Caitlin requested a backup group of models just in case.

With everything handled, Caitlin called Sebastian to ask how the investigation was going.

At a private apartment, Tyler and the others had been waiting for hours. Finally, Jake-Yates’s assistant—returned from the police station.

As soon as Jake opened the door, he was grabbed from behind and shoved inside.

“Help! Who are you?! What do you want?!”

“Don’t move!”

Jake was slammed onto the table, his face turned to one side. From the corner of his eye, he saw a tall figure walking in.

It was **Sebastian**.

“M–Mr. Vanderbilt...”

Jake looked horrified. “Why are you here? What are you doing?!”

Sebastian stepped inside and gave a signal. Tyler and Xavi dragged Jake to a chair and tied him down.

He struggled but couldn’t move. Seeing Sebastian’s cold face and the intimidating guards around, Jake broke into a cold sweat.

“Mr. Vanderbilt, what is this about?”

“I’m giving you a chance to live. Tell me why were there drugs in Yates’s bag and apartment?” Sebastian asked coldly.

“I already told the police! It was Yates–he used the stuff!”

“Liar!”

Sebastian's sudden roar made Jake flinch.

"Yates might be a celebrity, but he's always kept himself clean—no gambling, no drugs, nothing. So you want me to believe he suddenly became a junkie?"

"I—I swear, I don't know anything..."

"You don't know? You're his personal assistant. You manage his day-to-day. Aside from his agent and family, who else could touch his bag or enter his home?"

Sebastian had already ruled out family, the agent, the driver, and the housekeeper. Jake was the only remaining suspect.

"It wasn't me! I swear I'm innocent!"

Sebastian said nothing. His stare grew darker.

Tyler stepped forward. "Jake, we found out your father's seriously ill and needs surgery. You went everywhere trying to borrow money, and Yates gave you \$100,000—no strings attached. That's how much he trusted you. And how do you repay him?"

Jake's head dropped in shame.

"We also found a \300,000 deposit in your personal account. Where did that come from?"

"I... I borrowed it..."

"From whom? With your contacts, who would lend you that kind of money?"

Jake couldn't answer. His forehead dripped sweat.

"If your father knew his son betrayed the man who helped save his life, you think he'd take that money with a clear conscience?"

That struck a nerve. Jake burst into tears.

"I messed up... I messed up... I failed him..."

"Then tell us the truth," Sebastian demanded.

"Someone... someone came to me. He said if I did one job, he'd give me \800,000." Jake wept openly. "I was blinded *by* **the money**. I was

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desperate. I'm a piece of garbage..."

If his hands weren't tied, Jake would've slapped himself senseless.

Yates had treated him like a brother—given him money, supported him. And he repaid it with betrayal. The regret was suffocating

"Who came to you?"

"He's someone I met at Black Lung. Goes by the name Viper. He gave me the drugs. He's in that business."

Jake explained everything in detail. After confirming the story, Sebastian instructed Xavi to escort Jake to the police station to revise his statement, while Tyler and plainclothes officers headed to Black Lung to arrest Viper.

The team split up.

Jake was delivered to the station.

Tyler and the undercover officers posed as buyers. Eventually, they identified the room where Viper was hiding and kicked down the door

With a loud crash, the drug dealers inside were startled mid-transaction.

“Police! Don’t move! Hands up!”

At the shout, Viper—dressed in a black shirt—panicked. He shoved his men aside and leapt toward the window.

“Catch him! Don’t let him escape!”

AD

Comment

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Tyler burst out of Black Lung just in time to see Viper launched into the air by an oncoming car.)

Viper had made a habit of jumping out windows to escape. He'd aimed for the building across the street, planning to land **on** an LED billboard. But this time, he missed. He fell hard, landing in the street and getting hit by a speeding sedan.

His body was flung several feet before hitting the ground, leaving a pool of blood behind.

Tyler ran over immediately, saw Viper lying unconscious and badly injured, and called for an ambulance.

When the medics arrived, Viper was rushed to the hospital in critical condition. Tyler assigned two men to follow and keep watch over him, then returned to Black Lung to assist the police with cleanup.

The raid had been a major success. Several dealers were arrested, and a full sweep of Viper's office and the entire bar turned up over three kilograms of illegal drugs. Black Lung was shut down by law enforcement, and everyone involved was brought back to the station for further processing.

Even though Viper was still unconscious and unable to speak, Jake's testimony gave the police enough to issue an official statement **to** the

public.

In the report, the department clarified that Yates was not involved in drug use. He'd passed three drug tests, all negative. The drugs found in

his belongings had been planted by his assistant, Jake, who had been manipulated by known dealer Viper.

The case was finally cracked wide open.

Yates was officially cleared and released.

The day of his release, a swarm of reporters and camera crews flooded the police station. As Yates walked out under police escort, he was

met with a sea of flashing lights and shouting journalists.

PE's PR team quickly stepped in to take control of the scene. Before leaving, their spokesperson addressed the media.

"We will be holding a press conference for Mr. Yates shortly. Please refer to PE's official website for details. Thank you."

Yates was escorted into a waiting van. Inside, he saw Sebastian and Caitlin sitting there.

“Sebastian, Caitlin...”

He looked exhausted. The past hours had been brutal. Never in his wildest thoughts had he imagined Jake—his assistant of four years—

would betray him like that.

“You’re okay now,” Sebastian said, patting his shoulder.

“Thank you. Thank you both. Without your help, I’d probably still be locked up.”

Yates turned to Caitlin. “I’m sorry. I embarrassed you.”

He had joined PE hoping to bring honor to her and the company. And yet, his very first movie premiere had turned int

htmare scandal.

“This wasn’t your fault,” Caitlin replied. “You were set up. But I will say—you’ve always had terrible judgment when it comes **to** people. **You** need to start being more cautious.”

She was teasing, but it came from a place of truth. She still remembered the first time they met at NO.8—Yates had tried to impress her **with a** fake necklace. It hadn’t worked.

Chapter 447

Yates was **the** easygoing type, the kind who trusted too easily. It made him vulnerable.

“Alright, alright, you’ve made your point! No need to roast me alive!”

The tension eased, and Yates finally managed a genuine smile.

The topic shifted back to the drug case. Caitlin raised a critical question. “Yates never met Viper and never stepped foot in Black Lung. So why would Viper go out of his way to frame him? What was his motive?”

Sebastian suggested, “Could be what the police said. Viper was trying to pull in a high-profile target. Someone wealthy. **Drug** dealers always want bigger clients.”

“But that doesn’t make sense. If Viper just wanted someone rich, there are plenty of easier targets. Framing a celebrity, planting evidence that’s personal.”

“I swear I don’t know the guy,” Yates said. “Never met him in my life.”

At this point, Yates was shaping up to be

be the most wronged man

of

the century.

Caitlin was convinced Viper had a deeper motive. It wasn’t just about business.

“The only one who knows the truth is Viper himself,” Sebastian said. “Once he wakes up, we’ll get answers.”

“Exactly. Keep a close eye on him. When he wakes up, he’ll talk.”

Following their discussion, Caitlin and Sebastian took Yates to NO.8 for a proper shower and a celebratory dinner to help him unwind.

Once the police released their official statement, the public's opinion shifted quickly. The hate once directed at Yates was now aimed at Jake and Viper.

Jake was dragged across the internet as the most ungrateful snake of the century. Yates had helped him without hesitation, and Jake had betrayed him for money.

As for Viper, the public saw him as pure evil—someone who ruined lives for profit. Many felt his accident was nothing more than karma.

Though Yates was exonerated, the damage had been done. Several of his endorsements were dropped. The lost contracts couldn't be

recovered.

Fortunately, most of his fans remained loyal. Only a small number had turned on him. The majority stood by his side.

To help manage the aftermath, Caitlin advised him to lay low for a while. Once things cooled off, she'd help him make a strong comeback.

Soon, Tuesday arrived—the day of the new product launch.

TIG's show was held at the New York Convention Center under the theme "Majestic Elegance." Their event team had prepped everything **the** runway, *the* lighting, the seating.

Media outlets, fashion influencers, and

I several PE celebrities attended to show their support.

Justin, TIG's lead designer for the collection, was working closely with Starline's CEO Molly backstage. The **models** were ready, hair and makeup done, outfits in place.

But just ten minutes before the show was set to begin, news broke: XEG had launched their fashion show early.

A few reporters caught wind of it—and were shocked to see that XEG had used the exact same theme: "**Majestic Elegance.**" **Even the designs** looked eerily similar.

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The news spread like wildfire.

Some TIG staff saw it online and rushed to inform Justin.

He was stunned. How could XEG be showcasing designs identical to his? If they proceeded now, the media would definitely as TG Har copied them.

The show was about to start, and panic set in backstage.

Molly, fuming, immediately called Caitlin.

“Caitlin! We have a major problem! XEG just launched their show, and their designs are identical to yours—even the theme is **the same**. **They** went live early, and it’s already making headlines. What do we do now?”

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

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“I’m almost there. We’ll talk in person,” Caitlin said into the phone as she stepped backstage, flanked by **a team of models and** designer. Wade.

Justin spotted her and rushed over. “Caitlin-

But then his eyes fell on Wade and the fully styled models behind her. Confused, he asked, “What... what’s going on?”

“Justin, the situation’s urgent,” Caitlin said. “Our ‘Majestic Elegance’ theme was likely leaked. That’s why I’ve decided **to go** with **Wade’s** collection for this show.”

She turned to her team. “Go update the show visuals immediately!”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Come on, Wade. Get ready to go onstage.”

“Got it!”

With only a minute left before the show began, dozens of models waited at the runway entrance. Wade made last-minute adjustments, ensuring every detail was perfect.

Meanwhile, Justin stood off to the side, watching the whirlwind of changes unfold, feeling like he’d been cast aside.

“Caitlin,” he protested, “you’re replacing my designs last minute? This was supposed to be my show!”

“I get how you feel, Justin. But you’ve seen what’s happened. XEG launched their show early using our theme. If we go ahead with your designs now, we’ll be accused of plagiarism.”

Caitlin kept her voice calm. “Don’t worry, I’ll personally look into what happened. You’ll get your chance to shine. But right now, I need you to

trust me.”

Though Justin wasn’t satisfied, he had no argument. He swallowed his frustration—for now.

But deep down, he was furious. All his hard work, swept away. Now Wade would get all the glory, and he’d be nothing but a footnote. And worse, someone had leaked his designs. Who?

Out front, the giant digital displays quickly shifted from “Majestic Elegance” to the new title: “Mythic Silhouettes.”

The music changed to an elegant, vintage-inspired melody. Lighting and ambiance were updated on the fly.

Guests and reporters in the audience exchanged murmurs. Clearly, something had changed last minute—and everyone suspected it had to

do with XEG.

Still, even with the new theme, if the designs looked the same, TIG would be in trouble.

The host announced the new theme, and the show began.

The first model stepped onto the runway, wearing a stunning gown that blended vintage charm with modern flair.

Anyone who had seen the earlier XEG coverage immediately realized—this was an entirely different collection.

The designs were fresh, the cuts bold, and the artistry undeniable.

Chapter 448

As model after model **took** the stage, the audience was captivated, Cameras flashed **nonstop**. Fashion experts and guests **as they** took notes and recorded footage.

Backstage, Caitlin and Molly watched the live screen, both finally exhaling.

“Caitlin, I have to hand it to you—you’re brilliant,” Molly said, thoroughly impressed.

She finally understood why Caitlin had asked her to prepare a backup model team earlier. It wasn't just paranoia—it was foresight.

“You expected XEG might try to sabotage the show, didn't you?” Molly asked. “That's why you had Wade's collection as a **contingency**”

“I had a hunch,” Caitlin replied. “Zora's vendetta is too obvious. The moment they announced a show on the same day, I knew **they'd pull** something.”

“But how did our theme end up in their hands?” Molly frowned.

“We'll find out,” Caitlin said, eyes sharp. “I promise you, we'll find out.”

Twenty minutes later, the “Mythic Silhouettes” show wrapped up to thunderous applause.

Wade took the stage with the models, greeted by flowers and flashing cameras. All eyes were on him.

Overnight, the once-unknown designer had become fashion's next rising star.

During his short speech, Wade thanked Caitlin for her mentorship, acknowledging that without her guidance, this collection **wouldn't** have been possible.

Once the show concluded, Molly dismissed her models. The cleanup and backstage duties would be handled by TIG staff.

Later that evening, TIG hosted a celebratory gala at the Royal Grand Hotel. They invited all VIPs and guests to join them at the event.

Wade carefully packed up each look, placing everything in garment bags before handing them off to the logistics team.

As he turned to leave, Justin blocked his path.

Without warning, Justin punched him square in the jaw. Wade stumbled back, hitting the wall hard.

“What the hell, Justin?!”

“You know damn well what!”

Justin was fuming, his voice cracking with rage. “You leaked my designs, didn't you? Then you got to swoop in with your collection and take my spot. What a setup.”

“I didn’t!” Wade snapped. “Ask yourself how your designs got leaked. I had nothing to do with it. Caitlin only chose me because we needed a fallback plan. If this hadn’t happened, I never would’ve had the chance.”

“Oh, spare me,” Justin spat. “You think I don’t know what’s going on between you and Caitlin? You’re just a bootlicker! Everything that should’ve been mine, you sucked your way into getting! It’s disgusting.”

“You’ve got it all wrong,” Wade said firmly. “There’s nothing going on between me and Caitlin. She’s my boss, **and I re**

“Yeah, sure. Keep telling yourself that.” Justin shoved him

From Justin’s perspective, it was all clear. Wade had played landed that stage time on merit.

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her. That’s it.”

again before storming off.

to Caitlin and weaseled his way into the **spotlight**. **No way a nobody like him**

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At the Royal Grand Hotel's Aurelia Room...

Zora and her XEG team were already celebrating their "victory"

She had specifically chosen this venue knowing TIG's gala would be next door in The Marquis Room.

But at the moment, The Marquis Room sat empty. Zora smirked.

Looks like tonight's celebration belonged to XEG alone.

The XEG launch had gone off without a hitch. Their version of the "Majestic Elegance" theme was trending across fashion media.

Critics praised the line for its sophistication and timeliness. The positive buzz was strong

As the party wore on, Zora called over her assistant.

“Our show wrapped up perfectly. TIG was supposed to start half an hour after us. What’s going on over there? Did they cancel!”

Zora couldn’t wait to see Caitlin humiliated.

Comment

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“Zora, according to our sources, TIG’s launch event wasn’t canceled. It went ahead as scheduled”

“Oh?”

Zora smiled coldly. “They must not have found out yet, which is why they proceeded. Alright then—notify the legal team **to draft a** cease and desist letter. PR should also get started on a soft campaign accusing them of plagiarism!”

She already had her counterattack strategy mapped out. But her assistant hesitated.

“Zora, we... we might not be able to accuse them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Their theme is different from ours. We’re ‘Majestic Elegance. They used ‘Mythic Silhouettes.’”

“Ha! So they think changing the name at the last minute will help them dodge plagiarism charges?”

“It’s more than just the name. Their collection is entirely new. Different aesthetics, different vibe. It’s not plagiarism, the assistant **explained** nervously.

“What?”

Zora hadn’t expected this at all. She quickly grabbed her phone and began scanning the news for updates on TIG’s show.

To her frustration, TIG’s launch was now trending ahead of XEG’s. “Caitlin must’ve bought the trending spot,” she muttered bitterly.

Clicking into one of the top links, Zora watched the entire show unfold—stage design, model walks, behind-the-scenes highlights. Everything.

Her eyes widened as she took in the designs.

Weren't they supposed to also feature *Majestic Elegance*?

How... how did it all change so suddenly?

Still trying to piece it together, she was interrupted when Caitlin arrived at The Marquis Room with the TIG team and several fashion elites in

tow.

Caitlin spotted Zora standing by the entrance to The Aurelia Room and waved her guests inside, then walked straight toward her.

She stopped right in front of Zora, her eyes sharp and unflinching.

“Miss Harris. Your XEG show just so happened to take place on the exact same day as ours. And your celebration—right next door. Quite the coincidence. Don’t you think you owe me an explanation?”

“What’s there to explain?” Zora raised her chin with smug indifference. “Lots of brands hold shows on the same day.”

“Sure. But *Majestic Elegance* was our theme. Care to explain how it ended up in your hands?”

Zora’s smile didn’t reach her eyes. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. “Majestic Elegance* is our concept. **In fac** copyright claim with the proper authorities. So I’d watch your language.”

e already filed a

“Well done,” Caitlin said coldly. “You really are willing to stoop to any level. But stolen things never last. **You wanted to see me humiliated**, but our launch went ahead. And not just that—it was more successful than yours. Must be disappointing.”

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Chapter 449

Her voice grew sharper with every word, her tone laced with icy sarcasm.

“Go ahead and enjoy your little moment. Let’s see how long it lasts.”

Caitlin turned away, her aura cool and commanding, leaving Zora clenching her fists.

Zora forced a triumphant smile. *So what if Caitlin was mad? She had filed the copyright first. Even if Caitlin brought in lawyers it would be useless.

Inside The Marquis Room, TIG’s celebration was already underway.

Just as Caitlin walked back in, she heard someone calling her name.

“Caitlin!”

She turned to see Wendy running in with a bouquet of flowers.

“Wendy! Haven’t seen you in a while—you’ve lost

SO much weight!”

Caitlin gave her a quick once-over, impressed. Wendy looked slimmer, with sharper features and a noticeable glow.

“What motivated this transformation? Don’t tell me it was

love?”

She glanced behind Wendy, spotting Benjamin walking in with his own bouquet. She couldn’t help teasing.

“Absolutely not love!” Wendy said quickly. “I just

wanted an easier summer.”

She didn’t bother explaining that Benjamin’s weird obsession with chubby girls had driven her to slim down—she wanted to become the **kind** of girl he hated.

“Congrats,” Caitlin laughed.

Benjamin handed over his bouquet. “You were amazing tonight.”

Caitlin took it with a grin. “Thank you! Come on in. Wendy, help me

entertain him.”

Wendy rolled her eyes. “He’s not blind. He can entertain himself.”

She darted into the ballroom to find Molly. Benjamin sighed helplessly—Wendy had grown increasingly annoyed with him.

Simon arrived next.

“Busy night?” Caitlin asked.

“Doesn’t matter. I had to be here to celebrate your success. You and Molly pulled it off flawlessly.”

“Thanks. Go say hi to her.”

Guests continued pouring in. Meanwhile, Nolan and his sister Jillian arrived at the hotel—but they were headed to XEG’s event.

Nolan had attended the XEG show earlier to support his sister—it was her debut as lead designer since **returning to th**

try

But when he saw Caitlin, he turned to Jillian.

“Let’s go say hi.”

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“**You go.** I’ll **stay** back,” Jillian replied nervously.

She **didn’t** want to risk running into Sebastian.

Nolan approached Caitlin with a friendly smile. “Caitlin, I saw your launch online, Fantastic work. Congrats!”

“Thank you.”

Just as she caught Jillian trying to sneak away, Caitlin called out.

“Jillian! Don’t leave.”

Jillian paused, wary. “What is it?”

“I have a question.”

Caught under Caitlin’s sharp gaze, Jillian instantly tensed.

“I swear I haven’t gone near Sebastian! Ask Nolan if you don’t believe me!”

She was genuinely scared of Caitlin, and her guilt reflex kicked in.

“That’s not what I’m asking,” Caitlin said bluntly. “I heard you were the lead designer for XEG’s new collection?”

“That’s right.”

“Then tell me—did you personally draw and create the *Majestic Elegance* collection?”

Jillian froze *for* a moment before answering confidently.

“Yes. I drew and designed it myself. I’m the designer—drawing, planning, producing—that’s my job. Why are you asking?”

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

“Is that so? Because the design you claimed to have created looks nearly identical to a sample from one of our designers at is prett one-to-one match.

“I’m not here to argue who copied whom, but I do hope you’ll take a moment to reflect on why you became a designer in the first place, ber let yourself be used as a pawn without even realizing it.”

Caitlin ended it there, out of respect for Nolan, and didn’t press further.

Nolan gave a quick nod and pulled Jillian away. Once they were out of earshot, he asked, “What was that about? Your design was **cupled** Or... did you copy someone else?”

“I didn’t! I would never plagiarize! Don’t listen to her nonsense!” Jillian snapped, but doubt flickered in her eyes.

She remembered that Zora had given her the drafts. Could it be that Zora hadn't drawn them herself? How else could they have matched TIG's designs?

Inside The Marquis Room, guests were still arriving.

Yates appeared quietly, wearing a cap and mask. He came with Abel, who had convinced him to get out of the house for a change of pace.

Though Yates didn't look completely defeated, the recent scandal still weighed on him. If it weren't for Abel, he wouldn't have shown up.

When he saw Caitlin, he handed her a bouquet. "Caitlin, congratulations."

Abel also smiled and extended his well-wishes. "Congrats on TIG's big success."

"Thank you both for coming. Please, come in."

No one could see the darkness behind Abel's friendly smile. He had used Yates's scandal as a way in—and now he was quietly integrating himself into Yates's world. Caitlin was his target, but beyond that, he intended to strip Yates of his entire network.

As the celebration prepared to kick off, Caitlin scanned the room but didn't spot Sebastian.

Was he not here yet? Or had something happened?

She started to reach for her phone, but then the entrance stirred.

A tall figure stepped through the door carrying a large bouquet.

From a distance, Caitlin thought it was Sebastian. But when the man stepped closer and lowered the flowers, she saw it wasn't him.

Gasps rippled through the room.

"Isn't that Mr. Preston, CEO of SY Capital Partners?"

"Zeke's here too!"

Women in the room couldn't help looking on with envy. Caitlin always seemed to attract the most powerful men- magnetic field.

"Zeke? What are you doing here?"

Caitlin's tone was tinged with exasperation. She had told him to rest—why was he showing up again?

had her **own**

“**You’re** hosting an event. Of course I’m going to support you. These are for you.

“Thanks. But you really should be resting.”

“Lappreciate your concern. Don’t worry about me. Go do your thing I’ll take care of myself.

Zeke had already come to terms with his feelings. No matter who Caitlin married, his love was his own. Whether or not **shersfumed i** he would always support and protect her.

Just then, commotion broke out at the door.

Everyone turned to look as a life-sized cartoon Paddington Bear waddled into the room, pushing a cart filled with balloons, flowers, **and** a

three-tiered cake.

The cake was decorated with celebratory lettering.

Paddington Bear pushed the cart right up to Caitlin. Molly and Wendy rushed over.

“Wow! That cake is so pretty!”

Molly guessed who was behind it—she had helped pick it out, after all.

“Must be Mr. Vanderbilt’s work,” Wendy said, curious. “And he had it delivered by a bear! That’s adorable. I wanna hug it!”

Molly opened her arms, wanting to cuddle the plushy bear, but Paddington stuck out his plush arm and gently bounced her away.

“Hey! What’s with this bear? Rude!”

Molly was confused—no hug?

But in the next second, Paddington Bear wrapped Caitlin in a big, warm hug.

Realizing what was happening, Caitlin reached up and pulled off the oversized bear head, revealing-

Sebastian:

“Seb?” Molly blinked, then realized why he hadn’t let her hug him earlier.

“Oh my god, it’s Mr. Vanderbilt!”

“Seriously? Mr. Vanderbilt actually dressed up like a bear?”

The crowd burst into laughter and astonishment.

Most men would prefer a sleek, suave entrance, but Sebastian had shown up as a huggable goofball instead.

And somehow, it made him even more irresistible.

“Sebastian?”

Caitlin was stunned. Who would've expected this?

“Didn’t see that coming, did you?” Sebastian grinned, eyes locked on hers. He didn’t care what anyone else **thought—as long as it made her** smile, he’d do it.

Caitlin laughed and gently wiped the sweat from his forehead. “Alright, enough. Go change, you’re drenched!”

Another round of romantic envy rippled through the room.

Zeke, standing in the crowd, felt the difference between himself and Sebastian like a canyon. This **this** was **what unwaverint** fear looked like.

Seeing Caitlin laugh like that, he could only silently send his blessings.

Sebastian, with help from his team, shed the bear suit and joined Caitlin in greeting the guests.

Caitlin took the stage to speak on behalf of TIG and their success, with Sebastian watching from below, a proud smile on his **face**.

The event was a triumph. Guests mingled, connections were made, and spirits were high.

Abel used the opportunity to network with several top figures. But when it came to getting closer to Caitlin, he had no luck. Sebastian never left her side.

Meanwhile, a waiter holding a tray weaved through the crowd, moving steadily toward Caitlin and Sebastian.

No one paid much attention—except one man.

Zeke.

Standing at a vantage point, he had a clear view of everything. And he noticed something off.

The waiter's movements were stiff. His eyes were locked on Sebastian. And under the tray, one hand gripped something hidden.

Zeke reacted instantly.

“Sebastian! Caitlin! Watch out!”

“Bang!”

The gunshot rang out just as Zeke lunged forward, leaping across the floor to reach them.

He was too far to protect Sebastian—but he could shield Caitlin.

Panic erupted. Screams filled the room as guests scattered in terror.

Sebastian pulled Caitlin into his arms and ducked, shielding her instinctively.

Caitlin turned *her* head just in time to *see* Zeke crash to the ground, blood blooming beneath him.

“Zeke!” she screamed.

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

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Tyler and his team rushed into the room at the sound of gunfire, immediately tackling the would-be assassin before he could escape. **The** weapon was confiscated on the spot.

Caitlin and Sebastian hurried to Zeke's side and found him lying in a pool of blood, his arm hit, staining the marble floor bright red.

"Zeke... Zeke..." Caitlin crouched down, her voice trembling with panic.

Sebastian stared at the man bleeding before him, his expression unreadable. He hadn't expected Zeke to leap in and take the bullet—for both him and Caitlin.

He quickly gave orders to secure the area and called for an ambulance.

The room was in chaos. When the shot rang out, Simon had shielded Molly instinctively. Benjamin had rushed toward Wendy, but lost control of his momentum and slammed directly into her.

Wendy was knocked flat to the ground, pinned beneath him.

Sebastian's security personnel began restoring order. Once the guests learned the attacker had been captured, they slowly emerged from

hiding.

People were shocked to find that the injured man was none other than Zeke, CEO of SY Capital Partners. No one could figure out why **an** attempt on his life had occurred during a celebration.

Sebastian addressed the crowd to calm their nerves, and for those wishing to leave, he arranged for escorts out of the venue.

The gunshot had echoed into the adjacent Aurelia Room, where Zora's assistant hurried back to inform her of the incident.

Zora was stunned to hear Zeke had been shot. Why Zeke?

Ximena, who had also been at the XEG celebration, immediately bolted upon hearing Zeke's name.

"Mom! Where are you going?" Zora called after her, but Ximena didn't respond. She just ran.

Zora's stomach churned. Her mother had visibly panicked at the mere mention of Zeke. Could it really be...? Had there been some illicit affair between them?

Ximena arrived at The Marquis Room, breathless, just in time to see Zeke lying on the ground, his arm soaked in blood.

Her knees buckled. Tears welled up in her eyes.

She wanted to scream his name—"Son!"—but couldn't. Not here, not in front of everyone. So she stood there, trembling, her heart breaking,

Simon had already wrapped Zeke's arm with makeshift bandages. When the ambulance arrived, the paramedics carefully lifted him onto a

stretcher.

“I’ll ride with him to the hospital!” Simon announced, his hands still covered in blood as he ran alongside the gurney.

Ximena watched her son being taken away, pain twisting her face. But she didn’t follow them. Instead, she turned to Caitlin.

“What happened, Caitlin?”

“There was an intruder at the party. Zeke was accidentally shot during the attack.”

Chapter 451

“**Is he** badly hurt?”

“He was shot in the arm. We’ll know more once we get to the hospital.”

tot

Caitlin quickly addressed the remaining guests. “I’m very sorry, everyone. Due to this unexpected incident, tonight’s celebration will end here. I hope we can meet again under better circumstances.”

She and Sebastian left for the hospital, with Ximena following behind. Molly also decided to tag along,

As the crowd thinned, Wendy—still sprawled on the floor—snapped angrily, “Are you planning to keep lying on top of me forever?”

Benjamin, dazed, quickly scrambled off her. “I was trying to save you!”

“Save me? You nearly killed me!” Wendy shoved him aside and stood up, rubbing her aching head. She glared at him like he was a walking

disaster.

Benjamin rolled his eyes. “Hey, have you lost weight recently? Who told you to slim down?”

He’d noticed right away. She looked noticeably leaner.

Wendy glared. “None of your damn business!”

“...Fine.” Benjamin muttered.

Wendy didn't want to spend another second near him. She turned to leave, but as Benjamin instinctively reached out to stop her, his hand accidentally grabbed her dress.

Riiip-

There was an audible tear. A sudden chill hit Wendy's legs.

She looked down.

Her brand-new dress had been torn, revealing the most mortifying sight—her cartoon-print underwear, starring none other than SpongeBob

SquarePants.

“Aaaaaah!”

Wendy let out a shriek. Benjamin froze, stunned at the unexpected revelation.

SpongeBob? On her butt? It was so ridiculous he couldn't help but burst out laughing.

Wendy's face flushed deep red. She yanked a tablecloth to cover herself and glared at him with tears in her eyes.

"You pervert! You disgusting jerk!"

She was mortified. Thank God most people had already left, or she'd never show her face again.

Realizing he'd gone too far, Benjamin rushed to help, quickly taking off his jacket and wrapping it around her waist.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!"

But the jacket didn't fully cover her. Benjamin grabbed her tablecloth to help conceal her properly. "Come upstairs with me! I've **got a**

room. I'll have someone bring you a change of clothes."

Wendy had no choice. She glared at him but followed him upstairs. Every time she crossed paths with Benjamin, **something catastrophic**

happened.

At the hospital, Zeke was rushed into emergency surgery.

Caitlin, Sebastian, and Ximena arrived shortly after. They found Simon waiting outside *the OR*.

“How is he?” Caitlin asked.

“He’s in surgery. Try not to worry too much,” Simon replied.

Caitlin nodded. “We’ll stay here. Go clean yourself up.”

“Alright.”

“Thank you. Thank you so much,” Ximena said, bowing her head.

Simon left. Ximena sat down by the OR doors, her heart heavy. Caitlin stayed by her side.

Sebastian, needing to handle follow-up matters, left after ensuring Caitlin had security with her.

A phone call came in. Caitlin walked over to the window to take it.

Not long after, Zora arrived, having tracked down her mother. She found Ximena sitting outside the operating room, pale and *dazed*.

“Mom! What are you doing here? Why did you come?”

“Don’t ask. Just go back,” Ximena replied, visibly shaken.

“Why can’t I ask? I know it’s Zeke in there, isn’t it? But why are you here, waiting for him like this? What is he to you? A boy toy? An old flame? Did you two have some dirty little secret?”

Smack!

The sound echoed as Ximena slapped her daughter across the face.

Zora reeled back, stunned, clutching her cheek.

“You hit me?! You’re siding with some outsider over your own daughter?” she screamed.

A

